

Administrator's Address Concerning the NNSA Response to the 9/11/01 Terrorist Attack

October 2, 2001

Presented by John Gordon, Administrator, NNSA

Good afternoon. And good morning to those of you joining us from the west.

It has now been three weeks – 21 days – since the horrific events of September 11. The images that are seared into our consciousness make it seem like only yesterday – they are so vivid and so painful. Yet, for the most part, we are back at work, inconvenienced by the continuing heightened security measures, and wondering what happens next in this new war on terrorism.

Today, I want to give you a report on NNSA's response to those terrible events and talk a bit about where we are going in the wake of that terrible day.

I want to make certain that each of you know how proud I am of how the entire NNSA team responded. Our team of 37,000 Americans performed with tremendous energy and compassion.

Immediately following the second plane crash into the World Trade Center, and even before the third and fourth crashes, the NNSA went to full alert. We went immediately to security condition two – SECON-2. We secured our weapons, our material, our facilities, and – most importantly – our people. Weapon convoys went to safe havens – all were off the roads in an hour and a half. Numerous barriers were set up to restrict traffic and anyone and anything entering our sites was carefully checked.

Emergency Operations Centers were immediately staffed and operated around-the-clock to keep communications open to perform vital coordination, and continually assess the security situation. Those on our team who operate these Operations Centers did a wonderful job and we owe them very special thanks.

Our emergency response teams also went on heightened alert at the first moment of the crisis. That alert continues today – some had deployed to New York City to assist in recovery and others are poised for any possible follow-on event.

Our security and protective force personnel are those whom we have seen the most since this all began. They have done an extraordinary job – with long, long hours and sometimes difficult conditions.

The strengthened security measures have been a real inconvenience to many, but they are absolutely necessary and I thank you for your patience, your understanding, and for your ideas on how we can do even better. I do know first hand how much the protective forces appreciate your words of support and thanks.

It is important to note that during this entire crisis, the integrity of our security posture has been maintained.

By teaming with the Office of Security and Emergency Operations, we really did bring the best assets to bear on each and every issue. We are grateful for the outstanding contributions of Joe Mahaley and General John McBroom and from their staffs.

But I also want to thank each one of you who continued to contribute to our mission through these difficult times by simply coming to work and doing your job. We have an incredibly important mission – contributing tangibly to the national security in so many different ways. We must be tireless and relentless in our efforts to do our jobs to make the world a safer place.

The infamous events of September 11 should really have only made us only more committed to our mission.

We all know that the planners and designers of the September 11 attacks have not yet been found. And we believe some who assisted and perhaps some who tried to participate in the attack are still at-large in our country. Their resolve and their hatred for us is likely no less than before.

And when we bring justice to these terrorists, we must be prepared for further attempts to attack America and Americans. As the President has said repeatedly, the war against terrorism will not be short. While we hope never to see another September 11, we almost certainly have not seen the end of terrorism.

I know how hard my friends George Tenet at the CIA and Bob Mueller at the FBI are working – along with literally thousands of their staff – to break the backs of these terrorist cells and groups. I know how hard they are working to give us the intelligence and operational support we need to understand the threats and take the precautions that we need to take.

And I know how hard our military is working to be ready to respond. And I know they are also working hard with the FAA to help improve the security in the air over all our sites.

We are doing our share as well, and we need to be prepared to do even more. We remain at SECON-3 – really an enhanced SECON-3 – with special emphasis on high-energy threats. We are likely to be at this level for some time to come. And frankly we are poised to return to even higher levels if and when conditions change.

Again, I know that this can be a real inconvenience or even a hardship to some, but it is warranted, for the protection of our people, our weapons, our material, and our facilities.

About a week and a half ago, I decided to go see for myself how we were doing. In two days I visited six sites to talk with our operations office managers, plant and laboratory directors, and with our protective forces. I can report that protective and security forces are energized, highly-trained, well-equipped and motivated! I was very impressed with the sense of urgency and commitment of the entire NNSA team to do whatever it takes to deal with terrorism. There are hundreds of wonderful stories out there: about the unions who called management immediately and said “whatever it takes.” About the protective force at Sandia who are helping the Air Force man the gates at Kirtland to get people through the gates a little bit faster... and the Sandia guards who won millions in the lottery who have stayed on their jobs; and how about the contractor in Amarillo who delivered hundreds of jersey barriers to Pantex and refuses to take compensation?

The stunning events of September 11 have sounded a major wake-up call to our community. Even while recognizing and appreciating the dramatic efforts to protect our people, our products, our materials, and our facilities, we know there is much more to do. Over the years we have identified problems and enhancements, but we never followed through on all of them and we never received enough resources or paid enough attention to solving them. We have seen some shortcomings for so long that we don't see them anymore. We think public traffic through the center of the Los Alamos complex is normal. We think a semi-public road next to sensitive facilities is normal. We think parking our vehicles next to critical facilities is normal.

Our wake-up call tells us that terrorists can strike anywhere. It tells us that we must

be prepared for high-energy events we've really not contemplated before – coming from azimuths were not thought about before. It tells us that the planning for an event may be much more sophisticated and coordinated than anticipated. It tells us that many more people may be involved than we thought before September 11.

Our wake-up call tells us that we must not again fall into a state of complacency – we must put in place, permanently, features that will better protect our people and our mission. And at the same time, we must learn to operate effectively and efficiently in this more secure environment.

So there will be inconveniences. We will have to control access in some areas more carefully all the time – not just in time of heightened security. We may have to walk a bit farther and not park next to certain buildings. We may have to limit vehicle access on what are now very convenient thoroughfares.

And we will need to invest precious resources in more secure facilities and greater physical protection and better protection of our vital information systems. In the short term, this will probably mean more people devoted in this task, but in the long term we must make better use of technology. This is a real opportunity to make technology work for us – to capitalize on the very great capabilities we have in our organizations.

Well, so what? What are we really doing?

First and foremost I want you to know that we are doing everything possible to provide the right level of security at every site including our Headquarters facilities. For those of you in Forrestal, I know you are concerned with vehicular access around our facility. The Secretary and I share that concern. We are continuing to work with the D.C. City Government to put in place measures that will further improve security. We are tied in closely with intelligence and law enforcement and have access to all relevant data – and we will always be conservative when making a security call. You need to be alert to unusual activities; you need to give us the good ideas we haven't thought of, and we all need to keep on appreciating the protective forces.

Second, we are completing a vulnerability assessment of our high-risk targets to ensure that we adequately protect weapons, special nuclear material, information, and critical processes. Roger Hagengruber is heading this effort for us.

Third, I have directed the development of a prioritized list of the security improvements we need to make – at every site. We will put resources against the greatest needs and we will work down through this list.

Fourth, we are working closely with intelligence and law enforcement by placing NNSA experts in their facilities and on their working groups so they can get the fastest turnaround to the hardest questions. We are ably represented on the White House Counter-terrorism Task Force now and expect we will soon be working with the Office of Homeland Security outlined in the President's speeches.

Fifth, we know the threat has changed after September 11 – or at least how we think about the threat has changed after September 11. So, along with Joe Mahaley, I have asked DOD to join us in an immediate interagency review of the design basis threat.

I have established a group, drawing from all the work at our facilities to define what we can bring to the fight – and not just in the nuclear area. We have huge capabilities in many technical areas from chemical and biological weapons, to sensors, to aircraft and airport security. We possess a wide-range of truly unique expertise and technology that exists nowhere else in the U.S. I want to make sure that the full capability is made available to the national effort by reaching out to other agencies and strengthening our support. John Harvey is leading that effort here.

We will also promote greater integration of our sensor R&D programs. Spread across our enterprise is some of the best sensor work in the world. We can do much more to bring this technology to bear on our problem and can do much to sharpen our work and make it more broadly available.

With respect to special nuclear materials inventory management, I have tasked our Counter-terrorism Task Force to immediately begin coordinating with the Strategic Materials Working Group to carry out an assessment of our material storage and protection programs. My sense is that there is much we can do to better protect materials and rationalize where we store them.

I've directed a task force to undertake an end-to-end systems review of how NNSA would respond to a nuclear or CBW incident – from detectors, to response, to forensics. We know what we can do now.... We have much to offer and need to take a true systems approach.

And finally, we should review our personnel security and human reliability programs to ensure ourselves they are up to date and properly focused. As part of this effort we need to take a renewed look at operational security.

To help pull all this together, I've asked Bill Knauf and John Meinhardt, from Sandia, along with Bill Desmond from NN and Toby Johnson from SO to join the Working Group on a temporary basis – to spend full time helping organize all our work and keep all our balls in the air. We don't know all the answers or all the good ideas. Make sure the Working Group receives your ideas if you see something we are missing. Bill will be reporting this work on our web site and seeking good ideas we may have missed.

I've outlined a rather long and complex list of tasks, but I can describe my vision for the work in this counter-terrorism area pretty simply. We need to do three things:

- protect ourselves;
- accomplish our mission; and
- help others.

To protect ourselves we want our security forces to be so efficient and effective, and our facilities so strong that a terrorist will see no chance of success. Frankly, the uniquely talented people, the very special weapons and material we have custody of demand no less. We owe the American people no less.

We know that the war on terrorism will last for years. Thus we must be able to accomplish our mission in a heavy security environment. We must carry out normal stockpile stewardship – production, surveillance, refurbishment – and meet DoD requirements. We need to meet our commitments in Naval Reactors. And, more than ever, we need to accelerate our work on nonproliferation. For the past three weeks we have turned inward to protect America and Americans. But we know terrorism knows few borders – and protection of weapons and materials in Russia and elsewhere is every bit as important as it is in America. We cannot allow these tragic events to make us afraid, to do our mission – for then the terrorists will have won. So, while we will operate within an appreciably greater security burden, we must find ways to ease that burden by putting our technology to work for us. But that will take some time – now it's time to get back to normal work and normal travel – whatever that is in this business – and move on with our mission.

And, with all this great talent and the taxpayer's investment in our enterprise, we need to help others -- we must make those skills and technologies we have developed available to others in the fight against terrorism. We will continue to keep our emergency response assets ready to deploy and assist – even as we look to improve them. We are bringing together the multitude of capabilities to make certain

that other agencies know how we can help them with national problems. And we are looking to accelerate materials protection control and accountability work and reactor safety internationally.

Protect ourselves, accomplish our mission, and help others.

Our mission is vitally important to the national security of this great Nation. The American people are counting on us and we are not going to let them down. These attacks have dramatically changed the way in which we look at threats to our facilities, to our information, to the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, special nuclear materials, high explosives, and other hazardous materials.

I am proud to be associated with NNSA. I am proud of our mission and am even more proud of how we responded to this crisis – and proud of what we are going to do in the future.

Whenever I find myself absolutely exhausted at the end of a day, I am drawn back to the haunting images of the devastation of these attacks and particularly to the firemen who survived the collapse of the World Trade Center who would not stop working to locate their fallen comrades. While these images and the grim reality of these appalling, murderous assaults will be with us forever, we must continue to draw strength from our respective faiths and the importance of our work to ensure that acts such as these are never again repeated.

During our lifetimes, we as Americans have saluted the flag and sung the National Anthem and God Bless America hundreds of times. However, following the events of September 11, I think most of us now see the flag a little bit differently than before – we see its colors brighter and its symbolism even more meaningful and important. I think most of us now sing the National Anthem and God Bless America with a bit more feeling and focus on the true meaning of each and every word – God Bless America and God Bless each of you. God Bless your families! Thank you.